**New world... New web... New skills...**

**OK, so what's all the buzz about 21st Century teaching and learning?**  
If you are interested in becoming more familiar with the philosophical theory behind the Classrooms for the Future initiative, then read on... If you would prefer to be more engaged while learning about why the integration of technology into our classrooms is so imperative, scroll down this page to check out a very powerful video entitled, "Pay Attention"...  
  
**Why are 21st Century skills important?**  
We live in a wired, globalized world in which communication and collaboration are possible 24/7. As society and the workplace changes, the skills that students need to live and thrive in it also change. The competition will be fierce and can come from anywhere in this "flat" world. In some ways, students today are ahead of their elders. Technology is second nature to them, and they accept and use it without question.  
  
What does this mean for educators? As educational leaders, we should understand changes in technology and how they reflect changes in the world around us. We should also provide new and innovative technology tools to our students in order to prepare them for new challenges they will encounter upon entering our high-tech society. Because new technologies and new capabilities engage and motivate students, we can use them to educate.  
  
The North Central Regional Educational Laboratory has identified the following four categories of 21st Century learning skills that are essential for today's students:

* ***Digital-Age Literacy*** (basic technological literacy, multicultural literacy and global awareness)
* ***Inventive Thinking*** (adaptability and managing complexity, self-direction, creativity, risk taking, higher order thinking and sound reasoning)
* ***Effective Communication*** (teaming, collaboration, interpersonal skills, interactive communication, and personal, social and civic responsibility)
* ***High Productivity*** (effective use of real-world tools, ability to produce relevant, high-quality products, and prioritizing, planning and managing for results

The Partnership's 2004 report *Learning for the 21st Century* states, "Today's education system faces irrelevance unless we bridge the gap between how students live and how they learn." They live with Web 2.0 tools, but schools must help them use the tools to acquire new skills, not just play with them. Even more, today's education system faces irrelevance unless we bridge the gap between how well American students achieve and how well students in the rest of the world are doing.  
  
The role of teachers will be to guide students in using the new tools for academically rigorous investigations and presentations. In addition, using collaboration and communication tools with educational methods that also promote 21st Century skills - such as project-based learning - will help students acquire the abilities they need for the future. Therefore, providing access to a new generation of online educational software that can help the students acquire and maintain necessary skills is essential.